

## **The First 50 Women in Idaho Law**

### **MAXINE DOROTHY WHITNEY**

**May 24, 1948**

**(1900 – 1990)**



**Maxine Dorothy Whitney** was born on December 7, 1900, in Wyanet, Illinois, to Monroe Gesner Whitney and Blanche (Olds) Whitney. She moved to Coeur d'Alene with her parents and younger brother, Merrill, in 1906 to seek new opportunities promised in the West and, in particular, the booming mining economy of north Idaho. In 1908, her parents built the house that Whitney lived in all of her life. Her father had pursued many endeavors, but settled on being a lawyer and, later, served as a probate judge in Coeur d'Alene.

Whitney always excelled in school. After graduating from Coeur d'Alene High School in 1918, she briefly attended Whitney College of Commerce, a business college started by her father, before teaching for two years in Coeur d'Alene from 1918-20. Whitney then pursued a college degree, attending Oberlin College in Ohio from 1920-22 and then took a year off to teach in Coeur d'Alene before returning to Oberlin to earn her A.B. degree in history in 1924. After graduating, Whitney returned to teach in Coeur d'Alene from 1924-28. She pursued a master's degree in economics during the summer of 1925 at the University of Oregon and the summer of 1929 at U.C. Berkeley, before attending Stanford University full-time from 1929-30 to earn her M.A. in economics. Thereafter, she returned to teach school at Coeur d'Alene High School from 1930-36.

Whitney excelled in Pitman Shorthand. Given her father's founding of the local business school, Whitney decided to teach at, and manage the operations of, Whitney College of Commerce from 1936-43. As such, many in the community claimed that "Maxine taught them business."

From 1942 to 1945, Whitney was the court reporter for the Eighth Judicial District. After working in the courts for three years, Whitney decided to attend law school. She attended the University of Idaho College of Law from 1945 to 1948, working part-time in the law library until, at the age of 47, she graduated. Whitney immediately sat for, and passed, the Idaho Bar, being admitted as the state's twentieth woman on May 24, 1948.

Whitney practiced law in Coeur d'Alene, specializing in probate and estate planning. When her father became sick in 1953 and was forced to step down after a long career as a probate judge, Whitney was asked to serve out the remainder of his term. Whitney did so, and was elected on her own merit for a succeeding term. She served as probate judge in Coeur d'Alene from 1953 to 1958. In 1958, Whitney reentered private law practice in Coeur d'Alene, retiring twenty years later in 1978.

Linda Palmer Judd (No. 39 on this list), who began her practice in Post Falls in 1970, recalls "Miss Maxine" vividly, reminiscing: "there were not many female role models in the practice of

law in the early 70s in North Idaho. However, for me, one woman stands out: Ms. Maxine Whitney.” Judd says Whitney,

had been a respected, well-liked and admired probate judge for many years prior to taking up private practice. She knew the intricacies of the law in which she practiced, she was diligent, caring, compassionate, smart, tough, elegant, stylish, a woman of strength and virtue and, above all, professional. I never heard her whine or bemoan her circumstances as a woman lawyer, but I know she faced some powerful barriers at times . . . Ms. Whitney was never too busy to talk to me or to gently point out a legal issue I had overlooked, but, most of all, she helped me by just being the exceptional lawyer she was.

Whitney remained active in the Coeur d’Alene community even after her retirement. She was president of the Soroptimist Club in Coeur d’Alene and loved music and theater.

Whitney died in Coeur d’Alene on March 30, 1990.